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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS AFTERMATH - ABDULLAH UNDER PRESSURE,
KARZAI CONFIDENT, GHANI STRATEGIZING

Classified By: Polcouns Annie Pforzheimer, Reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) In separate meetings August 30, Dr. Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani told us that they are losing faith in the system of electoral challenges delivering a government that will have full legitimacy. President Karzai, meanwhile, is focused on his vote count and confident he will win in the first round even if he loses whole provinces to charges of fraud. Abdullah seemed ill at ease and under tension, as his followers are urging him to reject the process. Ghani - who plans to meet with President Karzai late August 31 - told us that he may sue the IEC for being partial, and posited that his role as a mediator could be the only way to a new government that restores the people's faith. End summary.

Abdullah: The Cool is Eroding

¶2. (S) Dr. Abdullah met with Ambassador Tim Carney, SRAP senior advisor Rina Amiri, and Polcouns Pforzheimer and immediately expressed his suspicion with the upcoming SRAP meeting in Paris ("why are they meeting so frequently?"), his annoyance with the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) ("it's not independent at all") and his impatience with the election results process. Carney reviewed the complaints procedures and safeguards, but Abdullah maintained his criticisms that the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC) was not being effective. He returned to the same bottom line he has expressed previously: if inflated turnout showed a province like Ghazni, where few people live and fewer voted, having nearly the same number of voters as Kabul, then "I will run one day out of patience."

¶3. (S) Abdullah asked repeatedly for the final list of polling sites, in order to compare this to his agents' records and to the tally numbers. Carney undertook to get the UN and IEC to release this list, which should have been made public immediately after the election. (Note: In a later communication, UNDP-Elect director Cook promised Ambassador Carney the list would be made public August 31. End Note.) Abdullah vented his frustration that numbers being released by the IEC were opaque and didn't show whether or not they contained any "quarantined" boxes, that despite a recent visit by SRSR Eide and some IEC technical experts their spokesman does not explain the tactic of releasing small amounts of voting numbers. "I have to explain this to the people" he said, and it doesn't make sense; furthermore they all think these results are final and don't understand the challenge period ahead.

¶4. (S) Interestingly, Abdullah - who had extremely deep pockets throughout the election period - bristled when we suggested he conduct his own survey of polling sites and locations to match results with the tally centers numbers. That would be too much trouble, he said, and "I have no money for an operation that would be like another campaign. The

international community is paying for observers and the IEC, but who pays for this?" (Comment: this remark could signal that one rumor we're hearing is true - businessmen who were backing Abdullah are starting to move away from his camp and towards Karzai, in view of Karzai's better chances of winning. End comment.)

15. (S) Abdullah has been publicly quoted complaining about fraud and the process to a visiting group of supporters and other leaders from six eastern provinces, and he told us that these kinds of groups visit him every day, sometimes numbering a hundred people. He had a delegation visiting at the same time he received us, and had buffet tables set up in his garden for an Iftar dinner for dozens. He repeated his concerns that an inflated turnout would be "unacceptable" to all these groups and to him, and that he has tried using the ECC complaints procedure but has nothing, to date, to show for it. His people want to demonstrate but it's too dangerous; he will "keep everyone at home" and not resort to protests. But, he said, Afghanistan would be unable to build anything substantive on top of an illegitimate government, and the public opinion in the United States would be affected.

16. (S) Predicting that the North would not be as upset as those in the South who had voted for change, Abdullah said some of his supporters are encountering violence and retaliation. He blamed the Minister of Education for a campaign to pressure teachers to support Karzai, and ruefully compared Karzai to the parable of a thief who does the unthinkable - steals the poor man's last blanket.

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Karzai - I Can Lose Two Provinces and Still Win

17. (S) Speaking to Ambassador Eikenberry alone on August 30, President Karzai had his vote count totals at hand. He was confident enough of his margin of victory that he could "lose Paktia and Ghazni" and still end up in the "high 50's" (he later clarified it would be closer to 53-54 percent), thus ending the process at the first round. He complained that the international media was overly focused on fraud allegations. Ambassador Eikenberry replied that these allegations and the complaints process were of importance to us and we strongly support a fully legitimate election process. Karzai said there was great urgency to get the final results out, citing potential unrest near Kabul and in the South. Eikenberry reaffirmed that the process needs patience, and that we are urging all candidates to behave responsibly.

18. (S) Karzai raised the future of U.S.-Afghan relations, including questions about how we see Afghanistan-Pakistan relations proceeding (and the future of the transit trade agreement); long-term U.S. presence in Afghanistan (Eikenberry clarified that we do not seek permanent bases, but rather we are committed to long-term training and assistance); and other post-election policy goals. Eikenberry emphasized that the issue of the quality of appointments to cabinet posts and governorships is crucial; American policymakers cannot justify giving assistance to a ministry headed by someone -- such as current Minister for Water and Energy Ismael Khan -- who was politically important to Karzai's election but incompetent to run a ministry.

Ghani - Let's Go Back to Go Forwards

19. (S) Ashraf Ghani, back from five days' rest and medical treatment in Dubai, was uncharacteristically serene when Ambassador Carney, SRAP Advisor Amiri, and Polcouns called on him later the same day. Alone at his home, apparently

receiving no calls or visitors, he said the elections had inflicted systemic damage on Afghanistan and were illegitimate. Calling the North a "second Waziristan" in the making, he said that the insurgency had won the election, the government had been shown to be corrupt, and voters had lost faith that their votes meant anything. "The elections were stolen by the Elections Commission," he said, stating that he and other candidates planned to sue the IEC in the Supreme Court for bias.

¶10. (S) Ghani emphatically called for a return to the less partisan principles of the Bonn Accords and suggested four possible scenarios:

- Karzai and Abdullah make a deal (unlikely);
- the international community gives up on the central government, and builds up the provinces (a long-term, extraordinarily expensive commitment);
- a transitional government is formed, by those who will give up their future right to be engaged in politics. This is a "back to Bonn" arrangement which would prepare the country for legitimate elections in two years;
- a "national" government, with Ghani's firm belief that this can only work if UNSRSG Eide is replaced by someone who can "choreograph what is happening - not just react to it."

Some of these options could require a Loya Jirga or other Jirga that could begin with minimal legitimacy but then create a government that will restore the legitimacy, through non-corrupt practices and a compact with the Afghan people, that Karzai has lost since 2004.

¶11. (S) Ghani claimed that Abdullah may try to mobilize 5,000 mullahs to denounce the elections, a tactic that Ghani termed suicidal since once the mosques are against the government, it can't be controlled. He also claimed that Abdullah was as much a part of the establishment - and the problem - as Karzai; for example, Abdullah had no problem getting ANA airlift during the elections because his people remain in positions of power throughout the government. Finally, Ghani said, Abdullah does not truly control his people and should be careful, the delegations that Abdullah is receiving from the South are "sent by Karzai" so Abdullah will take the bait and encourage demonstrations. Once he is linked to violence, Abdullah will be dropped by the international community, Ghani said.

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¶12. (S) Ghani said that he will see Karzai on August 31, in the late evening, something he has put off but now feels is necessary at least "to see his mindset." He indicated that he is not so "principled" that he would never take a job in a Karzai administration, but that when asked in the past his price had been for Karzai to exile thirty of the most corrupt members of the government - including Karzai's brother. He now sees himself in a "mediator" role and with no future in politics, he said, and repeated that the people need a sense that someone is in control of the process, has a plan, and is not only reacting to events. In that light, he has refrained from public interviews or appearances since the election, both during his time in Dubai and after his return.
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